The Effects of Preexisting Preferences on Televised Viewing of the 2000 Presidential Debates

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by

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Television vastly changed the way in which the modern presidential candidate must angle his or her campaign. Information that previously could be passed on only through the articles of newspaper writers suddenly became available to the public straight from the candidates' mouths. Even when audiences could hear the candidates' voices through the medium of radio, it did not bring voters face-to-face with the candidates in the way that television does. There is little doubt that this change played a strong role in our nation's very first televised presidential debate in 1960 between Richard Nixon and John Kennedy. Many historians credit Kennedy with projecting a more attractive and camera-friendly image than Nixon did. Whitfield describes Nixon's appearance, writing, "…Nixon's appearance in the first debate in 1960 suffered due to his 'Lazy Shave' powder streaked with perspiration, in contrast to Kennedy's grace under televised pressure," (116). The effect of this first debate was clear, as Lang and Lang write, "Two-thirds of Nixon partisans felt confident of their candidate's superior debating skills; only 4 out of 33 thought Kennedy might do better. … Eighty-nine per cent of those who watched or heard the first television encounter thought Kennedy had bested Nixon in debate or at least fought him to a draw," (282-3). From that point on, candidates had to make a strong impression on the electorate whenever the cameras began recording.

The presidential debates receive some of the closest attention of all of the election year campaign events. However, despite their current popular status, the televised debate has only grown and thrived within half a century. The reason why the televised debate has thrived in American politics is its inherent potential to connect with significantly more people. Salant estimates that during Nixon's nation-wide 1960 campaign, he Nixon

may have spoken to 10 million people, while 75 million tuned in to see him debate Kennedy (347). This point illuminates one reason why there is so much attention around the debates. These events offer candidates the opportunity to reach many individuals with the use of little resources. Therefore, how debates affect their audience, and even what types of individuals make up those audiences, deserves significant research and evaluation.

Debates, of course, are only a small part of political content on television. Anyone with a fairly basic cable package can select which ideological orientation he or she wants to hear from commentators on 24-hour news networks. During presidential election years, television news seems to devote entire blocks to the daily travels of each candidate. The months that lead up to major elections are saturated with countless political advertisements clogging commercial breaks. It would be very easy for a viewer to become overwhelmed by the totality of political content.

In this framework, televised debates appear, on the surface at least, to be an effective cure-all for the discerning viewer. With the issues at hand narrowed by the organizers of the debate, potential voters can absorb a condensed amount of information by simply turning on their televisions. In his content analysis of the 1960 debates, Ellsworth cited Stanley Kelley, Jr.'s prediction from before those debates that they were "one way to increase the probability of rational choice on the part of the electorate," (794). However, the reality is that the debates are the arena in which many political phenomena converge. The factors that drive voters to watch, as well as those that affect the voting behavior process lurk below the surface of what seems like an efficient and convenient forum for the American voter to consume straight-forward information. The

goal of this project is to examine three aspects of presidential debates: which Americans tune into the debates, which groups perceive which candidate won them, and subsequently, how those debates eventually affect the bottom line, the audience's voting behavior.

HISTORY OF DEBATES

Many Americans watch the series of televised presidential and vice presidential debates a little more closely than other election year content. One reason is that the debates serve as a purportedly neutral source for reliable information. A prospective voter during the election season is inundated with many potential avenues for decision-making material. However, there remains something unique to the televised debates. Not many other campaign situations offer both candidates appearing on the same stage at the same time. Additionally, debates offer voters the opportunity to hear and see candidates' comments in their entirety and live from their own lips. Ideally, the debate represents the most "unbiased" type of political content because it is not edited by any third parties and it allows all candidates to address questions posed to them at the same time and under the same circumstances. As Sallant writes after the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates, "[Television and radio] have provided a direct link between politician and public; they have permitted voters to see and hear for themselves first-hand, without having to rely on the filter of a newspaper reporter whose selection of what and how to report, whose impressions and choice of words are necessarily his own," (344). Thus, for the voter who wants to get information from a relatively convenient and accessible format, the debates serve as a great vehicle for vote decision-making material.

The literature regarding presidential debates is rather recent, given the relatively short life of the events. Nixon probably had little idea of the extent of the mistake he was making when he appeared in that first 1960 debate without any makeup and sporting a 5 o'clock shadow. The debates have expanded significantly, though, since 1960. The Commission on Presidential Debates' website offers information that shows this progression. The four 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates were all variations on the panelist question-response-rebuttal format, with the first and last debate including opening and closing statements from each candidate ("CPD: 1960 Debates"). However, after Nixon's disappointing outcome in that campaign, future debaters were scared off for the next 16 years.

The debates returned in 1976 with Nixon's replacement, Republican Gerald Ford, and Democrat Jimmy Carter. This incarnation of the debates featured three panelist question-response-rebuttal debates between the candidates, which also included follow up questions from panelists, but the fourth debate was contested between the vice presidential candidates, Republican Bob Dole and Democrat Walter Mondale. Perhaps demonstrating the lack of interest in the running mate candidates, while each of the presidential debates had over 60 million viewers, the audience for the first ever vice presidential debate was only 43.2 million ("CPD: 1976 Debates").

When Carter came up for reelection in 1980, he only debated Republican Ronald Reagan once. However, before Reagan sparred with the president, he also debated Independent John Anderson in a question-answer-rebuttal debate with closing arguments. A month later, he took on Carter in a similar debate in which panelists at times could ask

follow up questions of the candidates. For this debate, 80.6 million viewers tuned in ("CPD: 1980 Debates").

The 1984 debates not only saw the return of Reagan to the podium, but also the return of the vice presidential debate. Reagan engaged Democrat Walter Mondale in two debates following a similar format as the previous debates used, including panelist follow up questions and closing statements. The vice presidential debate between Reagan's vice president, George H.W. Bush, and Democrat Geraldine Ferraro followed the same format as the presidential debates, and this time, perhaps on the back of Ferraro's position as the first woman on a major party ticket, drew a similar television audience to the presidential debates ("CPD: 1984 Debates").

Bush was present in the debates again in 1988, but this time he was campaigning for president. He debated Democrat Michael Dukakis in two question-answer-rebuttal debates with closing statements. Republican Dan Quayle and Democrat Lloyd Bentsen also had one question-answer-rebuttal debate with closing statements, but once again the vice presidents (46.9 million) drew significantly smaller audiences than their running mates (65.1 million and 67.3 million) ("CPD: 1988 Debates").

The 1992 debates marked a significant turning point in the style of the debates. First of all, Bush and Democratic challenger Bill Clinton were joined by Independent Ross Perot in all three debates. Additionally, while the first and third debates were the classic question-answer-rebuttal debates with closing arguments, the second debate took the town hall meeting format, where audience members could offer questions filtered by the moderator to each canddiate. The vice presidential debate also had three debaters for

the first time, as Vice President Quayle took on Democrat Al Gore and Independent James Stockdale ("CPD: 1992 Debates").

When Clinton and Gore returned to the debates in 1996, the format returned to including only the Republican and Democratic candidates. Clinton debated Republican Bob Dole twice, with the first being a question-answer-rebuttal-response debate with a single moderator and the second a town hall meeting. Gore met challenger Jack Kemp in a debate of the same format as the first Clinton-Dole debate. Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of these three debates was the relatively low television ratings. Neither presidential debate topped 47 million viewers, and the vice presidents debated in front of only 26.6 million viewers ("CPD: 1996 Debates").

This brings the progression of the debates up to those to be examined in this project in 2000. The first two debates between Republican George W. Bush and Vice President were question-answer-rebuttal debates with a single moderator. Their third debate switched to the town hall meeting format, also with a single moderator. Their running mates, Republican Dick Cheney and Democrat Joseph Lieberman, met for a debate in the same format as the first two between Bush and Gore; however, the focus of this project is the three presidential debates held in 2000. ("CPD: 2000 Debates").

HYPOTHESES

The main basis on which most, if not all, of the hypotheses of this project rest is the salience of preexisting preferences in both watching and judging the debates. The idealized vision of the debates, in many ways, rests upon voters' ability to demote these preferences in favor of a blank slate, or at the very least to disengage their own biases by considering the impact of their preferences. After all, if most of the people watching the

debates will not be affected by its content, then they seem to have little benefit to society in acquiring information and evaluating the candidates. By examining the relationship between viewers' preferences and their debate-viewing and judging pattern, this project will be able to give an evaluation of the benefit that campaign events like debates play.

While it would be ideal for each American to enter his or her consideration of each election with an open mind for measuring the merits of each candidate, no real person can be expected to do so. Individuals are greatly influenced by the identities and values of their parents, geographies, and life experiences. Additionally, the paradigm in which the two major political parties present the current state of American politics forces the preponderance of "red versus blue" and "left versus right" framing on almost all issues. It is not reasonable to expect individuals to judge each presidential candidate separately from the historical and emotional filters that people develop toward parties, ideologies and candidates over time. With that said, there is a measure of openness that seems inherent to having debates in the first place. Again, it would not make sense to see the candidates debate if nobody gained information from them.

Rahn, et al. studied the process through which individuals made candidate evaluations. In their study, they found that preexisting preferences not just for the candidate themselves, but for the associated parties and ideologies, played a major role. They write, "…when asked to explain their preferences, people are biased toward mentioning reasons that sound rational and systematic and that emphasize the object being evaluated, while overlooking more emotional reasons and factors other than the object's qualities (Wilson et al. 1989). Thus, people rationalize their preexisting preferences," (584). This alludes to a major issue with the involvement of preexisting

preferences in candidate evaluation. Respondents could easily, and it is worth noting, rather truthfully, say they prefer one candidate to another because of factors like the fact that the candidate comes from the same party as the party his or her parents supported. Instead, people are inclined to draw upon what they perceive as a sense of rationality and respectable judgment. For a respondent to say "I just do not like that candidate," seems simplistic; he or she would rather try to maintain face by referring to phrases and systems that imply a higher level of consideration.

Sigelman and Sigelman examined how viewers interpreted the 1980 Carter-Reagan debate in terms similar to those of this project. Their final conclusion shows the scope to which they found preexisting preferences to be a factor in how people perceived performance in the debates. They write:

> …it is clear that the public does not approach presidential debates cognitively unencumbered and determined to weigh the evidence evenhandedly. Only when the powerful impacts of prior beliefs and preferences are considered can one fully understand why presidential debates have not had the marked influence on election outcomes that many early observers anticipated. (627)

These are strong words with which to describe the affects, but also in terms of their implication for presidential debates in general. Sigelman and Sigelman present an image of the debates as somewhat disconnected from the election as a whole.

There are three distinct sets of dependent variables from the 2000 debate data to be studied in this project that address the three sets of questions regarding the presidential debates and how they affect voting behavior. The first question is: What characteristics are common to those who said they watched the 2000 presidential debates? To address this question, the variables of respondents' predictions before the debates of whether they would watch them, as well as their responses afterward as to whether they did watch the

debates, will be of interest. The second question, once the characteristics of debate-watching are examined, will be to find out which candidate respondents thought won the debates. The independent variables that will be examined for this question are respondents' party identification, ideological identification, preexisting candidate preference and the strength of that preference. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, is the question of whom respondents said they would vote for during the course of the debates. Attention will be paid to respondents' estimations of whether or not the debate affected them, but also the extent to which their opinion changed over the course of the debates through their preference for and opinion of the candidates. Respondents were asked explicitly if they thought each of the debates affected their opinion, yet they were also asked for their candidate preference before and after the debates, as well as how they felt about Bush and Gore as potential presidents. These variables will be useful for comparison to see if respondents were accurate in estimating how much the debate would affect their opinion. One of the variables of note for this project is how expected voting behavior changed during the debates, and it will be tracked through both the explicit responses of survey participants as to whether the debates affected them, as well as how those responses changed with debate watching.

In 2000, CBS News polled respondents before and after the presidential debates between Bush and Gore. The data from this set of questions offers insight into who watched the debates and what they took from them. The pre-debate surveys were conducted on October 2, 2000; October 10, 2000; and October 16, 2000, all of which were one day before the three debates. Similarly, the post-debate surveys took place on the nights of October 3, 2000; October 11, 2000; and October 17, 2000, all immediately

after the three debates. These surveys included standard demographical data, as well as questions of party identification, candidate preference, voting intention and various impressions about both the upcoming and past debates. In addition to measuring for whom respondents would vote and their opinions on the performance of the candidates during the course of the debates, the surveys also examined if people would be watching the next debate and if they felt that debate would affect their vote. It is from these responses that the effect of the debates on the audience as a group can be gauged.

DATA PRESENTATION

In CBS' data, there were two measures of whether respondents watched the debates. Respondents in the post-debate surveys were asked if they had watched that night's debate. Additionally, respondents in the second and third pre-debate surveys were asked if they had watched the previous debates. Those who answered right after each debate indicated at a rather high rate that they watched the debates. In the three post-debate surveys, 87.9%, 83.0%, and 84.9% of respondents who answered whether they watched the debates said they tuned in to the first, second and third debates, respectively (CBS News Post-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000; CBS News Post-Debate #2 Poll, October 2000; CBS News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000). These numbers are exceptionally high, especially when contrasted with other data in the pre-debate surveys. When asked before the second and third debates, respondents were asked whether they watched the previous debate or debates. This data shows that 53.9% of respondents in the survey before the second debate said they watched the first debate, while 64.8%, when asked before the third debate, said they watched either of the first two (CBS News Pre-Debate #2 Poll, October 2000; CBS News Pre-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000).

One obvious factor that probably affected this discrepancy between the post-debate and pre-debate surveys is that many respondents were common to both samples. The importance of this is that these individuals who were included in both surveys knew they would be asked about the debates afterward, while respondents in the second and third pre-debate samples did not know they would be asked about the previous debates, and thus, were not compelled to watch. Therefore, a disproportionate amount of those surveyed after the debates likely either truthfully watched that night's debate or at least said they did.

However, there is a logical reason why these results would be skewed in such a manner. Another factor that likely drove respondents to give unreliable answers was the social desirability factor. Belli et al. give their definition of how this phenomenon plays out, writing, "Broadly conceived, 'social desirability' as a response determinant refers to the tendency of people to deny socially undesirable traits or qualities and to admit socially desirable ones," (923). In essence, the post-debate survey respondents were more likely to watch the debates or say that they watched because they felt self-conscious about telling someone else they did not watch the debates. This phenomenon is similar to that of respondents being asked if they voted or plan on voting. The post-first debate survey included a question about how likely respondents thought they were to vote in the upcoming election. A staggering 88.8% of respondents said they would "definitely vote" in November 2000, and when respondents who said they would "probably vote" are added, the total rises to 97.1% (CBS News Post-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000). According to data from the Federal Election Commission, the actual turnout rate in 2000 was 51.3% of the voting-age population ("National Voter Turnout in Federal Elections:

1960-2000"). This is comparable to the contrast in the pre-debate and post-debate survey numbers regarding whether respondents said they watched the debates or, because they knew they would be asked about them, actually did watch the debates.

Rather obviously, these numbers do not hold up to the accepted statistics for viewer ratings and voter turnout. A 2000 *New York Times* article said the three debates had 46.6 million, 37.5 million and 37.7 million viewers, respectively, across all of the stations that broadcasted them (Rutenberg 28). This works out to an average of 40.6 million, and a *New York Daily News* article estimated roughly 44% of televisions turned on during the second debate were watching ("Ratings Drop for 2nd Debate" 148). This figure is significantly lower than the rates of those who said they watched the debates when asked afterward, all of which were over 80%.

The reason for the post-debate respondents' inaccurate depiction of respondents' voting prediction and debate viewing comes from psychological and social pressures inherent to the self-reporting format of the surveys. Zaller and Feldman described specific types of social desirability affecting respondents' accuracy in self-reporting, such as the tendency for Roman Catholics to give answers more in line with the Church's positions when previous questions had asked them to identify their religion. They write, "The mechanism responsible for each of these effects appears to be a tendency for people to answer questions at least partly on the basis of ideas that have been made momentarily salient to them," (602). In the case of a respondent addressing whether he or she has voted or will vote, as well as planned to or watched the debates, there is an inherent idea that is of permanent salience. The idea that political activity, including voting and watching the debates, is a responsibility for all citizens is instilled through various parts

of the culture. Just as the Catholic respondents in Zaller and Feldman's example first had to have their identity as a Roman Catholic referenced, respondents in these post-debate surveys were made aware that they would be asked about the debate afterward. Therefore, this identity led the post-debate respondents to be an unrepresentative sample in terms of watching the debate.

While the respondents in the post-debate surveys gave answers unrepresentative of the general population, those given by the pre-debate respondents were more in line with the television ratings. As Rutenberg and *The New York Daily News* article cited, 44% of televisions turned on during the second debate signified 37.5 million viewers, so by calculating an approximate baseline of 85.5 million, which represents 100% of the televisions turned on, approximately 54.5% were on for the first debate. This number is nearly identical to the data from the pre-second debate survey question about whether respondents watched the first debate (53.9%). This bolsters the validity of the data from the pre-debate surveys on whether respondents watched the previous debates, and thus, makes this portion of the data more useful as the dependent variable in this section than the highly exaggerated post-debate data.

WHO WATCHED THE DEBATES?

The first area of interest is whether respondents would watch the debates in the first place. Obviously, this area is of particular importance because it is easiest to test the effect of the debates on those who have seen them. There are certainly effects to those who do not watch the debates through media analysis and interaction with others; however, the focus of this project is mainly on how those who watched the 2000 presidential debates were affected. Therefore, studying the relationship between debate

viewing and other political factors may shed some light on how the debate audience may vary from the general population.

One relationship for this project to examine is whether there is a correlation between different measures of political involvement and the likelihood a person watched the debates. Two such independent variables are how strongly a respondent supports his or her preferred candidate and whether the respondent voted in the previous presidential election. The underlying idea behind these tests is that people who are more politically involved, either by exercising their right to vote or having a strong allegiance to one candidate over the other, would probably be more inclined to watch the debates. Throughout this section, responses to the pre-third debate question on whether respondents watched either of the previous two debates will serve as the measure of the dependent variable. With that said, there are three null hypotheses for this section. The first is that whether a person said he or she watched the debates is not related to whether he or she indicated voting in 1996. Secondly, whether a respondent said he or she watched the debates is not related to his or her party identification. The last is that whether respondents said they watched the debates is not related to whether they indicated their mind was made up for one of the two candidates.

Figure 1 is derived from the survey conducted before the third debate, showing a cross-tabulation of whether the respondent said he or she watched either of the first two debates and whether he or she voted in 1996. It shows that 68.1% of those who said they voted in 1996 also said they watched either of the first two debates. In contrast, 48.6% of those who said they did not vote in 1996 said they watched either of the first two debates. The chi-square statistic for the variables in Figure 1 is 4.849, which is significant at the

.028 level. Therefore, it can be said that the null hypothesis that watching either of the first two debates and voting in the 1996 debates are not related has been rejected.

While voting in 1996 showed a relationship to whether an individual watched either of the first two debates, party identification did not. Figure 2 shows fairly similar percentages across the various parties. Of the respondents who identified as Republicans, 76.9% said they watched either of the first two debates, while 67.1% of Democrats, 72.1% of Independents and 69.0% of those who identified as something else said they watched. The chi-square statistic for these two variables is 4.318, which is significant at .229. Therefore, the null hypothesis that party identification and whether a respondent watched either of the first two debates are not related is not rejected.

The third null hypothesis— that whether a person said he or she watched the debates is not related to whether that respondent indicated his or her mind was made up for one of the two candidates or not—can be analyzed by examining data from the same surveys. Figures 3 and 4 are cross-tabulations between the same dependent variable as Figure 1, whether the respondent said he or she watched the debate, and to what degree the respondent said he or she favored Bush or Gore. Each of the two figures is limited to those respondents who said they supported either candidate and then answered whether they had "made their mind up" to vote for that candidate, or if it was still "too early to say for sure."

These data from the pre-third debate survey show a distinction between the Gore and Bush supporters. Figure 3 shows that 73.9% of respondents who said they had made up their mind to vote for Gore said they watched either of the first two debates, while 65.0% of Gore supporters who said it was too early to be sure they would vote for Gore

said they watched the debates. The chi-square value for these two variables is 1.792, which is significant at .181. However, Figure 4 shows that the Bush supporters varied from the Gore supporters. The percentage of respondents who said they had made up their minds to vote for Bush and said they watched the first two debates was only slightly higher than the same level of support for Gore, 77.5%. However, of Bush supporters who said they were not yet sure if they would vote for Bush, only 56.1% said they watched the debates. The chi-square value for these two variables is 7.968, which is significant at the .005 level. Therefore, the analysis of these two relationships suggests that the null hypothesis could not be rejected when applied to the Gore supporters; however, it was rejected for the Bush supporters.

These results are somewhat puzzling. In theory, simply changing the candidate that each group is supporting should not change the relationship between the level of a respondents' support for a candidate and whether he or she watched the debates. However, in this case it did. There is a potential explanation for this result. Figure 5 shows the breakdown of who respondents thought would win the first debate by their party identification. Of those respondents who identified themselves as Independents, 34.9% said they thought Gore would win that debate, while less than a third of that number (11.2%) said they thought Bush would win. This estimation from a relatively unbiased group exemplifies the belief from before the debates that Gore would perform much better than Bush would. Therefore, while individuals who were dead-set on voting for Bush might not mind seeing him perform worse than Gore, those who supported him less emphatically may have been more inclined to avoid watching an event that could cause some questioning of their evaluation of Bush.

Overall, the examination of who watched the 2000 debates rejected one of the null hypotheses, rejected one for only one of the candidates, and did not reject a third. The first null hypothesis, that watching either of the first two 2000 presidential debates was not related to whether the respondent voted in 1996, was rejected. This suggests that respondents who were involved in previous elections by voting are more likely to be involved in another campaign, specifically by watching the debates. The analysis of the second null hypothesis— the level of support with which respondents said they backed their preferred candidate at the time is not related to whether he or she watched the first two debates— was less definitive. The null hypothesis was not rejected for Gore supporters, yet it was rejected for Bush's. These mixed results suggest that applying the relationship observed in Bush's supporters to a broader scope may be inaccurate. Instead, examination of this set of debates anecdotally may offer the best explanation for why this relationship was present in one candidate's supporters and not the other's. Thirdly, analysis of whether respondents watched the debates and their party identification showed no probable relationship between the variables. Tuning into the events was relatively constant across all four party categories.

WHO WON?

Once the debates finish, the first question being discussed, both on the air and off, is who won the debate? After all, the respondents' interpretation of performance in the debate could be a significant factor in deciding whom to vote for. This nebulous element is critical to analyzing the effect of debates. However, there are many layers to how people can interpret debates, as well as many criteria through which viewers may judge them. Did either candidate stumble over his words? How did the candidates look? Did

each candidate make a coherent case outlining his plans and beliefs? And, perhaps, do any of these factors really matter to the viewer, or does he or she already know who will win before the first question is asked?

To address the dependent variables of whom respondents thought would win and did win the debates, several independent variables were tested. The general hypothesis in this section was that respondents who showed a preference to a candidate, either explicitly or through a heuristic, were more likely to think that candidate would win the debate when asked for a prediction before the debate, as well as to think that candidate won the debate when asked afterward. Additionally, the hypothesis would further suggest that respondents who favored one candidate more strongly would be more likely to think that candidate would win or did win the debate than those at lower levels of support for that candidate. The correlating null hypotheses, then, would be that a viewer's prediction of who will win or judgment of who did win a debate are not related to that viewer's party identification, ideological identification, or candidate preference. An additional null hypothesis to be tested is that a viewer's prediction of victory or assessment of victory for a candidate is not related to the magnitude of his or her support for a preferred candidate.

In assessing who won each debate, as well as predicting before the first debate who would win, respondents to the CBS surveys gave answers that were strongly tied to their partisan leanings and ideological orientations. In the first pre-debate survey, respondents were asked who they thought would win that night's debate. Figure 5 shows those results sorted by the respondents' party identification, while Figure 6 shows a cross-tabulation of whom respondents thought would win the election and their

ideological orientation. Figure 5, which follows a pattern that was repeated in many of the results, shows that 59.5% of self-identified Democrats thought Al Gore would win the debate, while 32.4% of self-identified Republicans thought George W. Bush would win that night. While these two figures, especially Bush's, might seem low, there are other factors worth considering. First of all, the table shows that 51.0% of Republican respondents and 34.4% of Democrat respondents said they did not know who would win the debate or did not answer. This leaves only 16.7% of Republicans and 6.1% of Democrats responding that they thought their preferred party's candidate would lose the debate that night. The predictions for who would win the first debate from respondents self-identified as Independent broke down as follows: did not know or did not answer, 53.9%; Gore, 34.9%; and Bush, 11.2%.

Not surprisingly, the data in Figure 6 is very similar to that in Figure 5. For example, in predicting who would win the debate, only 4.0% of liberals (the group with the highest concentration of Democrats; see Figure 7) picked Bush and 21.9% of conservatives (the group with the highest concentration of Republicans) picked Gore. The other data follow their Figure 5 counterparts, with variations attributable to the fact that there seems to be some blending of respondents identifying themselves as Democrats and moderates. That is, as seen in Figure 7, 40.6% of respondents who selected some form of party identification (or independence) identified themselves as Democrats, yet only 15.3% of respondents who placed themselves on the 3-point spectrum selected liberal. This means more Democrats considered themselves moderate or conservative than liberal.

Additionally, respondents' predictions of the first debate winner by candidate preference followed a pattern similar to that of the party and ideological identifications. Figure 8 shows that 59.4% of those who favored the Gore/Lieberman ticket said they thought Gore would win the debate, while 33.0% of Bush/Cheney supporters predicted a Bush victory. Also, respondents who said they did not know who would win the debate or did not answer made up significant portions of each ticket's support base, as 37.2% of Gore-backers and 51.0% of Bush-backers either did not answer or said they did not know who would win.

All three of these tables show what appears to be a relationship between the three preference-based independent variables and prediction of who would win the debate. The chi-square statistic for winner prediction and party identification was 121.297, winner prediction and ideological identification was 66.134, and winner prediction and candidate preference was 158.773, all of which are significant at less than the .001 level. Therefore, all three null hypotheses are rejected. This analysis suggests that there was definitely a connection between respondents' party identification, ideological identification and candidate preference and their prediction for who would win the first debate.

Lastly, the question of whether strength of support for a candidate affects voters' likelihood to predict a victory for that candidate was examined. Figure 9 shows Gore-backing respondents' answers to a question asking them to gauge how strongly they supported him cross-tabulated with their predictions for who would win the first debate. Figure 10 does the same with the Bush-Backers. Of Gore supporters who said they "enthusiastically" supported him, 78.3% said they thought he would win the first debate,

while the remaining 21.7% either did not answer or indicated they did not know who would win. Not a single Gore supporter at the highest support level said Bush would win the debate. As the support levels went down for Gore-backers, so did the percentage who thought he would win the debate. Of those who said they supported Gore but with "reservations," 47.6% said they thought Gore would win the first debate. However, again, the remainder mostly did not answer or said they did not know (46.4%), as opposed to indicating that they thought Bush would win (6.0%). Lastly, of those who said they supported Gore "only because he is the Democratic nominee," 48.6% said they thought Gore would win the debate, while another 48.6% said they did not know or did not answer. Only one of these 35 respondents predicted Bush would win.

Bush supporters displayed a somewhat similar distribution, but at significantly lower numbers across the board. Of Bush's "enthusiastic" supporters, 53.8% said they thought Bush would win the first debate. As with the Gore groups, the remainder was mostly composed of those who either did not answer or said they did not know who would win—37.5%— rather than those who thought the opponent would win (8.7% predicted a Gore victory). The next group, however, produced an interesting variation from the Gore side's data. Of those in the second level of Bush supporters, those who said they support him but with "reservations," nearly as large a percentage said they thought Gore would win the debate (19.2%) as Bush (19.8%). The remaining part of this group was the strong majority, as respondents at this level of support either did not answer or said they did not know who would win at a rate of 61.1%. Lastly, those who said they supported Bush only because "he is the Republican candidate" were divided fairly evenly across the three categories, as 26.1% said they thought Gore would win,

34.8% said they thought Bush would win, and the remaining 39.1% said they did not know who would win or did not answer.

The analysis of these two tables offers a strong relationship between the strength of candidate support and predicting a victory for that candidate. The chi-square statistic for Figure 9's variables was 31.983, which is significant at less than the .001 level. Similarly, the chi-square value for level of Bush support and winner prediction was 36.283, also significant at less than the .001 level. For both candidates, the null hypothesis was rejected, suggesting a definite relationship between the strength of respondents' support for either of the candidates and predicting that candidate to win the debate.

Two main points stick out from these distributions of debate-winner predictions. Anecdotally, these data show a distinct opinion in the sample. Figure 5 shows that Gore held a better than 3-to-1 lead (34.9% to 11.2%) in Independent respondents who thought he would win the debate compared to those who thought Bush would win. This is backed up by the surprising number of Republicans who predicted a Gore victory, 16.7%, compared to only 6.1% of Democrats who picked Bush. The overall message going into the first debate was clear: the public expected more out of the seemingly more-practiced Gore than they did out of Bush.

The second pattern that these data display relates more to debates in general terms. For the most part, viewers thought that their preferred candidate would win the debate, at least more so than the candidate's opponent. This finding makes sense and coincides with preexisting preference literature. Debate viewers who already have their minds made up would likely have higher opinions of their candidate, and therefore, have

high expectations for that candidate's performance. The preexisting preferences are also a significant factor in how respondents judged the candidates' debate performance afterward, but they also play a major role beforehand.

Perhaps it is not surprising that respondents correspondingly favored their candidate in predicting who would win the debate. If the oratory skills and policies mentioned during the debate are valuable to the viewer in how he or she evaluates the candidate, it is logical that the candidate the viewer expects to score more highly in these areas, and thus win the debate, would be the candidate of his or her choice. However, to find such a definitive link between the party identification and ideological heuristics and predicting the debate winner, in addition to the understandable link with candidate preference, suggests that the debate audience has a strong idea of whom they expect will win the debates based on factors other than debating skills of the two candidates.

Similar linkages persisted as respondents were surveyed after all three debates about their judgment of who won each event. Figures 11-13 show the breakdown of who respondents thought won each of the three debates by their party identification. Of the respondents who identified as Republicans, 79.6% of those who watched the first debate and picked a winner said they thought Bush won it, while 70.9% of Republicans thought he won the second debate and 77.5% the third. Those same figures show that 93.1% of self-identified Democrats who picked a debate winner said Gore won that first debate, 66.8% thought he won the second, and 73.5% thought he won the third. As was true for the pre-first debate survey question of who would win, the majority of the remainder for both sets of party-identifiers generally did not think the other candidate won, but rather gave a neutral answer. In this case, 21.9% of Republicans and 22.3% of Democrats who

answered the question of who won the second debate said it was a tie, while 14.1% of Republicans who answered said the third debate was a tie. The exception to this trend came in the post-third debate survey, in which more Democrats said that Bush won the third debate (14.1%) than judged it to be a tie (12.4%).

Perhaps most interestingly, however, is the way the self-identified Independents judged the debates. For the first debate, the 122 respondents who identified as Independents and picked a winner were split exactly in half—61 to 61— between thinking Bush and Gore won. Independents who picked a winner split the next two debates between the candidates, giving Bush a 40.2% to 31.4% victory over Gore in the second debate, while 45.1% thought Gore won the third debate, compared to the 35.2% who thought Bush won it. The main point is that those who identified with a party thought that their party's candidate won each debate at a rate of no less than two-thirds; at the same time, the Independent viewers were evenly split on one debate and thought each candidate won one of the others.

As is apparent in the strong polarization of the partisans on this issue, the analysis of the data shows definite relationships between party identification and who respondents thought won the debate for all three cases. For the first debate, the chi-square statistic is 221.130, for the second it is 175.994, and for the third it is 161.060, all of which are significant at less than .001. Therefore, the null hypothesis that party identification and which candidate was perceived as winning the debates are not related is rejected. As seen by the high percentages of Democrats who thought Gore won each debate and Republicans who thought Bush won, there appears to be a strong relationship between these two variables.

Additionally, as occurred in the pre-debate prediction of who would win the first debate, the separation of post-debate assessments by respondents of whom they thought won the election by ideology was similar to the party identification data. Figure 14 shows respondents' indications of who they thought won the first debate cross-tabulated by ideological identification. As was true in the previous discussion of ideology, the groups do not match up proportionally with party identification. As Figure 7 shows, the self-identifying liberal group is less than half the size of the Democratic group, while the conservative group is very close to the size of the Republican group. The major difference is that the self-identified moderate group is composed of more Democrats (42.0%) than Independents (29.5%). This disparity is one explanation why the potentially "neutral" moderates tend to favor the Democratic candidate.

Figures 14-16 show data that are not as clearly divided as the party identification data in Figure 11. Of respondents who categorized themselves as liberal and picked a debate winner, 87.5% picked Gore as the first debate's winner, 66.7% said he won the second debate, and 61.4% said he won the third. On the other end of the spectrum, 76.6% of those surveyed who identified as conservative and picked a debate winner said Bush won the first debate, 67.9% said he won the second, and 70.7% said he prevailed in the third. It should be noted that in the surveys for the second and third debates, respondents were given the option to declare the debate a tie, providing one explanation why both the conservative perception of a Bush victory and the liberal perception of a Gore victory are significantly lower than in the post-first debate data.

The major shift in this variable comes from who identified as moderates. Of the members of this group that picked a winner, 67.2% said Gore won the first debate, a

plurality of 42.6% thought he won the second debate, and 52.8% said he won the third. In the cases of the second and third debates where the response was applicable, 30.0% and 18.3%, respectively, of moderates called the debates a tie, again explaining why there is a drop off from the first debate's high rate of perceived success for Gore to his much more modest showings in the next two debates. Without placing too much emphasis on it, it warrants mention that a main reason why Gore won all three debates in the eyes of the moderates was their significantly larger proportion of Democrats (42.0%) than Republicans (22.4%). Therefore, this dramatic shift toward Gore from the supposedly "neutral" group is not incredibly surprising when combined with previously mentioned higher expectations for Gore's performance than Bush's.

Much like the party identification data, the analysis of the relationship between ideological identification and which candidate was perceived as winning the debates shows a strong linkage between the two. The chi-square statistic for these variables in the first debate is 123.189, for the second it is 97.075, and for the third it is 730635, all of which are significant at less than .001. For all three debates, the null hypothesis that ideological identification and the candidate respondents picked as winning the debate was rejected. In much the same manner as was true for party identification, the analysis shows an overwhelmingly likely relationship between the two variables, again suggesting that the audience is affected by these identities in the process of deciding who wins presidential debates.

The data in Figures 11-16 show that two heuristics, ideology and party identification, are strongly related to whom a viewer thought won that night's debate. Additionally, respondents' preexisting preference for a candidate also proved to affect the

likelihood that the respondent would judge that candidate to have won the debates. Figures 17-19 show cross-tabulations of who voters thought won each of the three debates with who they said they would vote for before each debate if they had to vote at that instant. The voting question is not exclusive to the two candidates involved in the debates. Of respondents who said they would vote for Al Gore and said either Gore or Bush won each of the debates (or in the case of the second and third debates, called it a tie), 95.9% said Gore won the first debate, 68.9% said he won the second, and 80.1% said he won the third. At the same time, of those who said they would vote for George W. Bush and answered who won the debates, 85.8% said Bush won the first debate, 74.8% said he won the second, and 78.8% said he won the third. Again, the issue of the option of declaring the debates a "tie" in the second and third surveys probably explains why the numbers for the latter two debates are lower than the first. In addition, of the groups that indicated they would vote for Gore or Bush, the highest perception of victory rate that was given for the opposing debate-featured candidate was after the first debate, where 8.2% of potential Bush-voters said Gore won. To take it a step further, in the surveys where a tie was an option, the best that either candidate did with his opponent's potential voters was after the third debate, where 5.1% of those who said they would vote for Bush said Gore won the debate.

Analysis of the variables in Figures 17-19 shows that, like many of the other variables in this section, there was a connection between which candidate a respondent said he or she would vote for before each debate and who that respondent thought won that debate. This chi-square statistics for all three figures were extremely large, as the value for the first debate was 348.001, for the second debate it was 274.992, and for the

third it was 268.476, all of which are significant at less than .001. Consequently, the null hypothesis that there is no connection between which candidate respondents said they would vote for before each debate and which candidate they thought won each debate is rejected. This data suggest that candidate preference is another variable which definitely affects debate victory perception, in this case affecting respondents to think that of the two candidates in the debates, the candidate that they preferred won.

The last facet by which respondents' perception of who won the debates must be broken down is the extent to which the respondent supports that candidate. Figures 6, 7, 11 and 14 have already shown that the two heuristics, ideology and party identification, are strongly related to the probability a respondent thought one candidate or the other would win or did win the debate. However, there is another angle to this phenomenon worth examining. If, as shown above, those who support Gore explicitly are more likely to judge that he won the debates, then there is potential for even greater stratification among those who said they support him.

Figures 20-25 show the extent to which respondents indicated that they supported their preferred candidate with their perception of who won each debate. Figures 20-23 use the answers to a question from the first and second pre-debate surveys that asked respondents to measure their support for either Gore or Bush— enthusiastic, with reservation, or only because he is the party's nominee—as the independent variable. Figures 24 and 25 use the responses to a different question from the third debate survey—whether respondents had made their minds up to vote for Bush or Gore—as the independent variable to gauge the support level for the preferred candidate.

The connection between respondents' level of support for their preferred candidate and who they thought won each of the three debates was similar to the data shown in Figures 9 and 10, where support levels were compared with who respondents predicted would win each debate. Figures 20, 22, and 24 show that of the strongest category of Gore supporters, those who said they were "enthusiastic," 99.1% said they thought he won the first debate and 80.2% thought he won the second. The response options were different regarding the third debate, but similarly 84.0% of those who said they had made up their minds to vote for Gore said he won the third debate. Again, in this discussion, the surveys for the second and third debates included the potential for calling the debate a tie. The numbers for the next level of Gore support, those who said they supported him but with "reservations," are lower than those of the enthusiastic group. Of this group, 91.4% said Gore won the first debate and 60.9% said he won the second. The other category of support for Gore in the third debate, those who said they preferred him but had not made up their minds to vote for him, said he won that debate at a 64.6% clip. Lastly, of the group that said they supported Gore only because he was the Democratic nominee, 96.3% said he won the first debate and 72.2% said he won the second. There was no third response group for the pre-third debate survey.

The results for Bush supporters in Figures 21, 23 and 25 are similar to those of the Gore supporters in Figures 20, 22 and 24. Of Bush's "enthusiastic" supporters, 95.8% said he won the first debate and 88.2% said he won the second. At the top level for the third debate, those who said they had made their minds up, 81.4% said Bush won the third debate. At the next support level down, those who said they supported Bush with "reservations," 79.4% said he won the first debate and 62.2% said he won the second.

For the third debate, 62.9% of those who said they supported Bush but had not yet made their mind up to vote for him said he won the third debate. Of the group that said they supported Bush only because he was the Republican nominee, 81.8% said he won the first debate and 62.5% said he won the second; again, there was no third response group for the question from the pre-third debate survey.

The relationship between these six variables and who the respondents said won each debate was evident through the analysis. For the measures of Gore support, shown in Figures 20, 22, and 24, the chi-square statistics were 7.806 for the first debate, significant at .020; 10.413 for the second debate, significant at .034; and 10.957 for the third, significant at .004. For the data in Figures 21, 23, and 25, the chi-square statistics were 12.650 for the first debate, significant at .002; 21.744 for the second debate, significant at less than .001; and 6.028 for the third debate, significant at .049. While all six analyses showed dependence between the two variables at 95% confidence, three of the relationships are called into question at more stringent confidence levels. At the .01 confidence level, the relationship between Gore support in the first debate, Gore support in the second debate and Bush support in the third debate and perception of debate victory are no longer definite. While the null hypothesis that the support level respondents have for their preferred candidate and who they think won each debate are related could be rejected in all six cases at the lowest confidence level, it cannot be rejected in those three cases at higher confidence levels. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected only for Gore's support in the third debate and Bush's in the first and second. The consequence of these somewhat mixed results is that there is a strong likelihood that the higher a respondents' support level for a candidate, the higher the probability that he

or she will pick that candidate as a debate's winner. After all, three of the analyses showed definite relationships. In light of this, the conclusion of this portion of this project is that there is very likely a relationship between candidate support level and perceiving that candidate to have won the debates.

HOW DID THE DEBATES AFFECT AUDIENCES?

While the patterns of who watched the 2000 debates and who perceived victory for each candidate are interesting, the dependent variable that is probably most relevant in terms of how it is affected by the debates is voting behavior. Specifically, this project focused on how respondents' candidate preference was affected by viewing the debates. For this section, several independent variables are noteworthy.

First, and perhaps most broadly, is the question of whether viewing the debates affected for whom a person intended to vote. To address this, whether a respondent watched the debates serves as the independent variable to be tested against the response to voting decision. The hypothesis behind this is that performance in the debates affects viewers' preferences for the candidates. Potentially, under the hypothetical situation that there is no clear "winner" to the debate, then no shift in the candidate preferences would be visible. However, given the fact that the majority of respondents picked a winner in all three post-debate surveys, this does not appear to be the case for the 2000 debates (CBS News Post-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000; CBS News Post-Debate #2 Poll, October 2000; CBS News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000). Therefore, the corresponding null hypothesis is that whether a person watched the debates does not affect his or her likelihood of voting for one candidate or the other.

The data that address this hypothesis show a greater distinction between mainstream candidate supporters and those who support "third party" candidates than they show a distinction between Bush's and Gore's supporters. Of respondents who said they watched the first debate and named who they would vote for if they had to vote at that time, 50.4% said they would vote for Gore, 44.2% said they would vote for Bush, and the remaining 5.4% were split between Ralph Nader and Pat Buchanan. Of those who said they did not watch that night's debate and named whom they would vote for, equal proportions— 43.2%— said they would vote for Gore and Bush, while the remaining 13.7% were split between Nader and Buchanan (CBS News Post-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000). As was true in the data from the first debate, the portions of the samples that did not watch the second and third debates indicated they would vote for Gore and Bush at levels slightly lower than those shown by the part of the sample that did watch the debates. The exception to this trend came in the second debate, where those who did not watch the debate actually supported Gore in a higher proportion (52.7% versus 49.5%) than did those who watched the debate (CBS News Post-Debate #2 Poll, October 2000; CBS News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000). One potential explanation for this comes from the data examined on who respondents thought won each debate. The second debate was the only one self-identified Independents judged Bush to have won, and therefore, it would make sense that those who did not see it supported Gore at a higher rate than those who did.

Additionally, the portion of the sample that did not watch the debates was at least twice as likely to indicate that they would vote for either of the "outsider" candidates, Nader and Buchanan (CBS News Post-Debate #2 Poll, October 2000; CBS News Post-

Debate #3 Poll, October 2000). The most obvious explanation for this comes from the format of the debates. Respondents who said they were voting for Nader or Buchanan probably were less likely to have watched the debates than those who said they were voting for Gore or Bush, because their preferred candidate was not involved. The absence of both of those candidates from the debates removes two main motivations for their supporters to tune in; they would not be able to reaffirm and add consistency to their beliefs in comparison to their candidate's, nor would they be able to make a comparison based on debate performance between their preferred candidate and the others.

The second independent variable is whom respondents thought won the debates. This examination sheds light on the extent to which respondents weighted debate performance. The hypothesis in this section is that if the debates are influential, then people who think one candidate or the other did a superior job should be more likely to say they intend to vote for that candidate. So, accordingly, the null hypothesis is that a respondent's perception of a candidate winning the debate does not make him or her more or less likely to indicate they intend to vote for that candidate.

The data comparing who respondents thought won the debates and whom they would vote for at that moment were strongly divided. Of those who said they watched the first debate and picked a winner, as well as named whom they would vote for, 88.5% of respondents who saw a Gore victory also said they would vote for Gore. Similarly, of those who watched the first debate, picked a winner and named whom they would vote for, 93.4% of those who said Bush won also said they would vote for Bush (CBS News Post-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000). The linkage between who respondents thought won the debates and whom they indicated they would vote for was just as strong in the second

and third debates. In each survey, no less than 92.9% of those who watched the debates and picked a winner, as well as named whom they would vote for, named the same candidate for each question (CBS News Post-Debate #2 Poll, October 2000; CBS News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000).

The reason behind this apparently strong relationship, however, is less clearly defined than the numbers are. If all respondents' considerations regarding whom to vote for were a blank slate before each debate, such a strong correlation between the perceived debate winner and vote choice would suggest that viewers placed heavy emphasis on performance in the debates. However, this clean baseline for viewers is obviously not reality. Instead, preexisting preferences once again appear to play a significant role. Therefore, examination of how viewers' vote choice before and after the debates offered more insight into whether the debates affected the voting decision.

The issues of who watched the debates and who respondents perceived as the winner are integral to understanding the nature of debate viewing; however, these points are only side notes without interpretation of how the debates affected voting decision in the 2000 election. How the debates change individuals' preference for candidates is the variable that is most relevant to the broader scope, the campaign context. Additionally, there is a seemingly inherent principle to the debates that suggests they exist to provide information to the public to help in selecting a candidate to vote for. If the debates do not serve this purpose, then the issue of what service they perform comes into question.

At the conscious level, respondents seemed to be willing to watch the debates but doubtful that it would affect their voting decision. Figure 26 shows that in the survey conducted before the first debate, 48.9% of respondents said they were very likely to

watch that night's debate, while an additional 33.9% said they were somewhat likely. In other words, the sum of these two groups, 82.8%, indicated there was some probability that they would watch that night's debate. However, at the same time, the majority of the group indicated they thought factors other than the debates would mostly influence their voting decision. The data on this were clearer in their message than that of the likelihood of watching the debate in the first place. Of the respondents who gauged how the debates would affect their voting decision, 80.6% said they thought they would vote based mostly on other factors. At its core, the data contrasted in Figure 26 seems to be at a point of contradiction. Staggeringly, 35.1% of the respondents in this study said they were "very likely" to watch the debate, yet they would "vote based mostly on other things." This fact goes against the supposed implicit ideal of the debates as a forum for information brokerage. If respondents who said they were somewhat likely to watch the debate but did not expect it to affect their decision are added to the very likely, the result is 64.0% of the sample who indicated some possibility of watching the debate, yet also indicating that the content of that debate would not affect their decision. This majority of respondents would appear to be at odds with the idealized vision of the debate.

Other variables in the data address respondents' conscious estimation of how the debates affected them. The survey conducted after the third debate asked respondents whether anything they heard from or about the debates made them change their mind about whom to vote for, as well as if anything helped them to make up their mind. Of those who gave a "yes" or "no" answer, 87.9% said nothing made them change their mind. However, on the question of if anything helped respondents make their minds up, 57.4% said that something in the debates did, in fact, help them make their decision (CBS

News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000). The data from these two questions suggests that there are two distinct groups within the debate watchers: those who already know whom they intend to vote for and are not likely to change that preference based on the debates and those who have not yet decided on their voting choice and may make that decision based on the debates.

While a majority of respondents said they saw something that helped them to make up their minds, analysis of the data does not give a definitive suggestion of what the debates helped the group to decide. Of those who said that something they saw helped them to make up their minds, 53.7% said they would vote for Gore, 43.8% said they would vote for Bush, and the remaining 2.5% were split between Nader and Buchanan (CBS News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000). The chi-square value for these variables is 17.687, which is significant at .024. However, when the analysis is limited to only those who said something in the debates helped them to make up their minds and said they would vote for Bush or Gore, the chi-square value is 5.077, which is significant at .079. The message of these data, then, would appear to be that watching the debates helped viewers decide to vote for either Bush or Gore but did not favor one significantly over the other.

In addition to measuring how the debates affected viewers' voting choice, another impact of the debates at the conscious level is how respondents' opinions of each candidate as president changed over the course of the debates. The effect of the debates can be gauged by whether respondents' relative feeling for each candidate as president changed at different rates among those who watched the debates and those who did not. The hypothesis in this case would be that the content of the debates would affect the

opinions of those who watched compared to the non-watching control group. Then, the null hypothesis would be that respondents' assessments of each candidate as president are not related to whether respondents watched any of the debates.

Figures 27 and 28 show the result of cross-tabulation between respondents' indication that they had watched at least one of the first three debates and their answer to a post-third debate question gauging whether they felt better, worse, or the same about Bush and Gore as president, compared to how they felt before the debates. Figure 27 shows a distinction between the opinions on Bush of those who watched the debates compared to those who did not. The debate watchers were somewhat evenly split across the three categories, as 41.2% said they felt better about him being president, 26.1% said they felt worse, and 32.7% said they felt the same. However, the data from those who did not watch any of the debates was skewed toward feeling the same. Of this group, 9.6% said they felt better, 21.2% said they felt worse, and the vast majority, 69.2%, said they felt the same.

Figure 28 shows that the data from the opinions of Gore as president are similar to those in Figure 27 for Bush. Of those who said they had watched one of the three debates, 35.8% said they felt better about Gore as president, 33.4% said they felt worse, and 30.7% said they felt about the same. As was true for the Bush-opinion data, those who did not watch any of the debates were strongly skewed toward feeling the same. Of those who had not seen any of the debates, 15.4% said they felt better about Gore as president, 13.5% said they felt worse, and 71.2% said they felt the same. The chi-square value for the Bush data was 29.852, significant at less than .001, while the chi-square

statistic for the Gore data was 33.500, also significant at less than .001. Therefore, for the opinions of both candidates, the null hypothesis is rejected.

From this analysis, a rather obvious explanation emerges. Those who did not watch the debates missed a main source of information for candidate evaluation. Thus, their tendency to say they felt the same about both Bush and Gore as president is not surprising. For both candidates, the percentage who said they felt both better and worse about their potential presidency was significantly higher in those who saw at least one of the debates. It seems fair to say the debates affect the opinions about the candidates of those who tune in.

While many of the variables in these surveys address respondents' conscious estimations of how the debates affected them, the ultimate measure of debate effectiveness is voting decision. The decision-making process certainly has several inputs, but how the debates affect viewers' opinions would seem to be a significant one. Despite whether individuals say the debate affected them or not, the bottom line to debate effectiveness is whether the respondents changed his or her mind over that time span.

A comparison of candidate preference throughout the sample from before and after each debate also sheds some light on whether the debates affected voting decision. By filtering the sample into those who saw the debates and those who did not, the change in candidate preference from the pre-debate period to the post debate period can be examined. The underlying hypothesis here is that those who changed their voting choice over the course of the debates were more likely to watch the debates than those who did not. Therefore, the null hypothesis that will be tested is that the part of the sample that changed their candidate preference over the period between the pre-debate and post-

debate surveys was more likely to have watched the debates than the portion of the sample that did not.

To gauge the extent to which respondents were affected in their vote choice by the debates, the rate at which the two different subsets of the samples— those who watched the debates and those who did not— changed their voting choice was examined. Because the pre-debate and post-debate surveys took place within about a day of each other, changes in preference can be generally isolated to the debates. Additionally, a change in candidate preference in this section signifies that the respondent selected a different candidate when asked after the debate whom they would vote for than when they were asked before the debate.

Overall, the data show little change in the candidate preferences of respondents, as well as little difference between the rates at which the two groups changed their opinions. Figures 29-31 show how respondents were divided by these two variables. For the first debate, as seen in Figure 29, 92.2% of those who said they watched debate did not change their candidate preference, while 89.2% of those who said they did not watch the debate did not choose a different candidate than the one they picked before the debate. Figure 30 shows almost identical numbers for the second debate, as 92.9% of respondents who watched the debate did not change their voting preference, while 89.0% of those who did not watch also did not change their preference. Figure 31 shows even higher portions of the sample not changing their candidate preference around the third debate, as 95.2% of debate-viewers did not change their preference, while 98.5% of those who said they did not watch the debate also did not change their candidate preference.

Analyzing whether a relationship exists between the two variables, whether respondents watched the debates and whether they changed their candidate preference, gives an indication of whether respondents' candidate preference is affected by the debates. The chi-square value for the first debate was .796, which was significant at .372; for the second debate it was 1.436, significant at .231; and for the third debate, it was 1.555, significant at .212. These significance levels indicate that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected in this case.

The analysis of these data yields two clear messages. First, there appears to be little immediate change in individuals' candidate preference as a result of watching the debates. Those who watched appeared to be about equally as likely to change their choice as those who did not. Secondly, the staggeringly high rate at which individuals maintained their preference, despite the fact that other analysis shows variation in indications of who viewers perceived won each debate, suggests that debate viewers attach little weight to their assessment of the debates when making their candidate selection.

CONCLUSION

Most of the findings in this project support the depiction of the debate audience as highly polarized before hearing a word out of either candidate's mouth. The ideal of a viewer who watches the debate to obtain unbiased information and make a decision from that point seems to be more exception than rule. This reality is not overwhelmingly surprising. Obviously, not every person is undecided prior to the campaign season; in fact, many have already made their decision. Yet these individuals still watch the debates for several possible reasons. The explanations for this phenomenon are many.

First, the content of the debates is a strong topic of conversation in the following days. While some viewers may have little interest in making a judgment on the candidates based on the content of the debate, they still want to know what was said in order to partake in "water cooler" discussion the next day. Other viewers vary from this group and more or less "root" as they watch in a way similar to if they were watching a favorite sports team. Supporters of either candidate can have their faith in their preferred candidate reaffirmed based on what he or she says, and at the same time, can generate further disdain for opposing candidate through his or her comments.

Marilyn Jackson-Beeck and Robert G. Meadow offer one theory that sheds light on the workings of televised debates. They examined the presidential debates in the 1960 and 1976 campaigns and found that the debates did not hold up to the description of helping the public make its decision based on the issues that it wanted to hear about. Instead, they found, that most candidates spent most of their time not even directly addressing the journalists' questions, and at the same time, journalists generally did not ask questions that addressed the main concerns of the public (Jackson-Beeck and Meadow 179). Instead, Jackson-Beeck and Meadow found that each participant had his or her own agenda in the debates. They describe these agendas, writing, "… at one extreme is the voters' agenda, represented by issue concerns raised on opinion surveys; in the middle is the journalists' agenda; at the other extreme is a third agenda, created by politicians who may raise issues independently," (Jackson-Beeck and Meadow 174). This argument is interesting, despite the fact that it could be discredited by only studying two debates as its sample. If the public wants to get information from the debates, it is problematic that the commentary of the candidates ends up addressing a different set of

topics. Jackson-Beeck and Meadow do not directly address whether they think the journalists present distorted the public's interests or if the candidates skirted those issues for fear of making a mistake, but regardless of who is to blame, this finding means that viewers who watch the debates as a source of vote-affecting information are not hearing about the issues they care about. This finding supports the contention that the debate as a forum for information for the viewer is an idealistic relic.

While this project focused on the impact of the presidential election debates, there is an interesting differentiation when examination of a party's primary elections is added. In another study, Mike Yawn, et al examined how the debates before the 1996 Republican Primary Election in Arizona affected viewer opinion. The group focused on three facets of the viewers' opinions of the candidates: viability, electability and voter preference. On the issue of whether an individual thought that a candidate could win the nomination— viability— the debate had a clear impact. On their pretests, the audience selected Bob Dole as the most viable by a significant margin; however after the debate, the audience actually named Pat Buchanan as the most viable candidate (Yawn, et al 168). The main reason for this was that Dole did not attend the debate, yet this result shows that the debate itself had a strong influence on the audience's perception of the viability of the candidates.

The second area that Yawn, et al. focused on was individuals' perception of electability— the likelihood that the candidate can win the general election against the other party's candidate, which was Bill Clinton in this case. The study's results found that perceptions of electability mirrored those of viability. Again, Dole entered the debate as the leader in electability, while Buchanan emerged after it as the leader in the

category (Yawn, et al 169). Another interesting finding in this category was the correlation between being perceived as the "loser" of the debate and a plummet in electability level. A staggering 84% of the audience perceived Lamar Alexander as the loser of the debate, and accordingly, his electability level dropped 18% from pretest to posttest levels (Yawn, et al 165, 169). The only other candidate who dropped in electability after the debate was the absent Dole.

The third and most relevant aspect of the debate that this study examined was vote choice. Again, this data followed the pattern of the previous two perception categories. Yawn, et al write, "Of the four participating candidates, all gained support with the exception of Lamar Alexander, who lost almost as many supporters as all other candidates combined," (170). Though redundant to the previous two measures, this category again shows that the perception by an overwhelming majority that Alexander lost led to him losing supporters at a very high rate.

Obviously, issues of viability and electability are not issues inherent to the presidential election debates, as these issues are addressed well before October of an election year. However, this study eliminated the powerful party identification heuristic that was so influential in this project's statistics. With this dynamic out of play, it is interesting that candidate preference changes were as volatile as they were in the study of the primary election debate. In many ways, this contrasting evidence shows that debates can facilitate information brokerage and changes in candidate preference; however, these effects are only applicable in a situation where the audience is not strongly divided in advance by party and ideology, as the audience for the presidential election debates is.

In another study, Arthur H. Miller and Michael MacKuen also studied the effects of presidential debates on individuals' opinions. This study, like Jackson-Beeck and Meadow's, focused on the 1976 presidential debates between Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. In prefacing their findings, Miller and MacKuen state that one important aspect of why viewers watch the debates is to establish differences between the candidates in order to discern which is preferable for them (335). With that in mind, Miller and MacKuen found a correlation between people watching the debates and noticing a difference between the candidates and parties. They write, "The public not only perceived significant policy differences between the candidates and the parties, but these perceived differences were found to be significantly related to debate exposure. The more debates watched, the clearer was the difference perceived to exist between the positions that Ford and Carter took on the jobs issue," (Miller and MacKuen 336). However, this study did not stop there. Miller and MacKuen also addressed how the debates affected viewers' opinions of the candidates. While they found relatively mixed results as far as how the debates affected viewers across the board, the researchers found a trend in those that were affected. Miller and MacKuen write, "… [debate] exposure reinforces the partisans' positive image of their own candidate and heighten their distaste for the opposition. Moreover, the debate impact is proportional to the strength of their partisanship," (341). Interestingly, though, Miller and MacKuen argue that the 1976 debate did not affect the outcome of the election. They write, "Thus we are left with an indication of minimal long-term debate impact on candidate evaluations, with virtually all potential effect absorbed by the viewers' perceptual predispositions. This result provokes

an obvious conclusion about whether the debates altered the election outcome: they did not," (Miller and MacKuen 342).

The findings of Miller and MacKuen are congruous with those of this project. Just as they found with the 1976 debates, preexisting preferences seemed to trump most effects of the debates. Additionally, their suggestion that the 1976 debates did not alter the 1976 election also would probably also be represented by the findings of this project, if not for the extremely tight final results between Bush and Gore. Because the results were so close in 2000, it would be difficult to dismiss any potentially influential factor as irrelevant to the outcome of the election. However, if the rather anomalous final outcome of the debate can be ignored for the moment, the 2000 debates probably would not have affected the outcome of an election in most years. As data cited from the post-third debate survey showed, for those who said the debate helped them make up their minds, the debates did not tend to push respondents in either candidate's camp. Instead, the debate focused their attention on the two candidates on the stage, rather than the other "third party" candidates.

So how can the results of both this study and Miller and MacKeun's co-exist with those of Yawn, et al, who found strong shifts between pre-debate and post-debate opinions? There are a few explanations that would suggest they can. First, Yawn, et al studied a primary, while Miller and MacKuen studied a general election. While there is likely to be some predisposition in primary voters, there is probably more negotiability to viewers' opinions. On the ideological spectrum, a shift from one Republican candidate to another is not as large as switching from the Democratic candidate to the Republican. Party identification, of course, is also inherently absent from the primary format. While

these two theories may seem to be contradictory, it is certainly plausible that taken in context, each can hold up.

The image of the current debate system cast by the data in this project is significantly different from the idealized vision of an event from which voters can gain information about the candidates and incorporate it into their voting decision. In theory, viewers would consider their issue positions and compare them to the candidates through the debate content and select a candidate that is most similar. However, this model is not supported by the findings of this project, so there must be other ways in which individuals associate their beliefs with their candidate of choice. In his discussion of the 1976 debates between Carter and Ford, Abramowitz identified three ways in which viewers reconcile their beliefs with those of their preferred candidate. He first discusses the rational voting model, writing, "Rational voting involves the selection of a candidate on the basis of issue positions. Here, consistency is produced by the choice of a candidate whose positions conform to those of the voter," (681). This model represents the idealized version of viewers assessing their own views, taking in the information presented by the candidates, then selecting the candidate that is appropriate. The second model is essentially an opposite version of the first, as Abramowitz writes, "In contrast, selective perception involves distortion or denial of reality. The voter either projects his own views onto his candidate or simply refuses to recognize disagreement with his candidate's views," (681). Lastly is the model that is the focus of Abramowitz's study, persuasion. He writes, "[Persuasion] involves the adoption by the voter of his own candidate's positions. Thus, the direction of causality is reversed from that of rational voting," (681).

Of the three models, the data in this project does not preclude any. However, the strong connection between party identification and other preference heuristics and the perception of who won the debates suggests that the second or third models were more prevalent than the first. If a large portion of viewers were objectively processing the information in the debates, one would expect to see a higher percentage of self-identified Democrats saying Bush won the debates or the same for Republicans with Gore. This is especially true for the issue of party identification.

While most of the variables analyzed in this project showed some relationship with respondents' decision to watch the debates, perception of who won the debates, or how respondents were affected by the debates, the link between party identification and perception of debate victory was particularly striking. Independent viewers essentially returned a split decision for the three debates, as a plurality of these non-party aligned viewers said Bush won the second debate, Gore won the third, and equal numbers had each candidate winning the first debate. However, in none of the debates did less than two-thirds of either Republicans or Democrats think that their party's candidate won each debate.

As a whole, the data and analyses presented in this project show a debate audience in which several factors dictated who watched, who viewers thought won, and how the content affected voting decision. In examining who tuned in for the debates, it appeared that individuals who were more politically involved, such as those who voted in the previous presidential election and those who had already made their mind up on which candidate to vote for, were more likely to watch the debate. However, while party identification and how supportive Gore-backers were did not appear to play a role in

tuning in, those who said they were sure they would vote for Bush were significantly more likely to watch than those that did not. One conjecture to address this is that supporters less devoted to Bush would be less willing to see their preferred candidate perform more poorly than Gore, as was expected.

The data and subsequent analysis of who respondents thought won each debate showed strong ties to identity and preference factors. Individuals who lined up at either end of the party identification and ideological spectrums generally thought the candidate that corresponded with their party or ideology would win, and then afterward, did win each debate. While the data moderately suggested the prediction of a Gore victory across the sample, the results of who actually won the debates were mixed. Either way, respondents who identified with the preexisting preferences were more likely to predict and judge things in a slanted manner.

The data with perhaps the broadest implication was that surrounding how the debates affected individuals. While the data did show that some respondents had help in making up their minds based on the debates, most viewers already had some idea of whom they wanted to vote for and maintained that preference throughout the debates. The analysis showed that there was no significant relationship between whether a respondent watched the debates and whether that respondent changed which candidate he or she intended to vote for. This wealth of data would appear to suggest that much of the electorate is already highly polarized by the time the debates come up on the campaign schedule, and those who do tune in to watch them take little away from the debates other than a reaffirmation of their existing preferences.

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Appendix A:

Figure 1: CBS/Vote in 1996 * Watched Previous Debates Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Pre-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000

		Watched Previous Debates		
		Yes	No	Total
CBS/Vote in 1996	Voted	323	118	441
	Didn't Vote	41	27	68
Total		364	145	509

Figure 2: Party ID * Watched Previous Debates Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Pre-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000

		Watched Previous Debates		
		Yes	No	Total
Party ID	Republican	123	37	160
	Democrat	141	69	210
	Independent	80	31	111
	Something else	20	9	29
Total		364	146	510

Figure 3: Gore Mind Made Up * Watched Previous Debates Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Pre-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000

		Watched Previous Debates		
		Yes	No	Total
Gore Mind Made Up	Mind Made Up	147	52	199
	Too Early to Say for Sure	39	21	60
Total		186	73	259

Figure 4: Bush Mind Made Up * Watched Previous Debates Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Pre-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000

		Watched Previous Debates		
		Yes	No	Total
Bush Mind Made Up	Mind Made Up	148	43	191
	Too Early to Say for Sure	23	18	41
Total		171	61	232

Figure 5: Party ID * Who Will Win First Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Pre-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000

		Who Will Win Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Don't Know/No Answer	Total
Party ID	Republican	35	68	107	210
	Democrat	147	15	85	247
	Independent	53	17	82	152
	Something else	9	7	23	39
Total		244	107	297	648

Figure 6: Ideology * Who Will Win First Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Pre-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000

		Who Will Win Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Don't Know/No Answer	Total
Ideology	Liberal	55	4	40	99
	Moderate	144	41	167	352
	Conservative	43	63	90	196
Total		242	108	297	647

Figure 7: Party ID * Ideology Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Pre-Debate #1Poll, October 2000

		Ideology			
		Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	Total
Party ID	Republican	4	79	125	208
	Democrat	68	148	29	245
	Independent	19	104	29	152
	Something else	8	20	11	39
Total		99	351	194	644

Figure 8: Gore/Bush Race * Who Will Win First Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Pre-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000

		Who Will Win Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Don't Know/No Answer	Total
Gore/Bush Race	Al Gore for Postsident/Joe Lieberman for Vice Postsident	192	11	120	323
	George W. Bush for Postsident/Dick Cheney for Vice Postsident	47	97	150	294
Total		239	108	270	617

Figure 9: Describe Gore Support * Who Will Win First Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Pre-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000

		Who Will Win Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Don't Know/No Answer	Total
Describe Gore Support	Enthusiastically supporting him	94	0	26	120
	Supporting him, but have reservations about him	79	10	77	166
	Supporting him only because he is the Democratic candidate	17	1	17	35
Total		190	11	120	321

Figure 10: Describe Bush Support * Who Will Win First Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Pre-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000

		Who Will Win Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Don't Know/No Answer	Total
Describe Bush Support	Enthusiastically supporting him	9	56	39	104
	Supporting him, but have reservations about him	32	33	102	167
	Supporting him only because he is the Republican candidate	6	8	9	23
Total		47	97	150	294

Figure 11: Party ID * Who Won First Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate		
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Total
Party ID	Republican	39	152	191
	Democrat	201	15	216
	Independent	61	61	122
	Something else	15	14	29
Total		316	242	558

Figure 12: Party ID * Who Won Second Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #2 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Tie	Total
Party ID	Republican	11	107	33	151
	Democrat	123	20	41	184
	Independent	32	41	29	102
	Something else	7	8	17	32
Total		173	176	120	469

Figure 13: Party ID * Who Won Third Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Tie	Total
Party ID	Republican	12	110	20	142
	Democrat	136	26	23	185
	Independent	41	32	18	91
	Something else	7	10	5	22
Total		196	178	66	440

Figure 14: Ideology * Who Won First Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate		
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Total
Ideology	Liberal	70	10	80
	Moderate	203	99	302
	Conservative	41	134	175
Total		314	243	557

Figure 15: Ideology * Who Won Second Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #2 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Tie	Total
Ideology	Liberal	42	8	13	63
	Moderate	112	72	79	263
	Conservative	17	95	28	140
Total		171	175	120	466

Figure 16: Ideology * Who Won Third Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Tie	Total
Ideology	Liberal	35	12	10	57
	Moderate	130	71	45	246
	Conservative	27	94	12	133
Total		192	177	67	436

Figure 17: 4-Way Presidential Vote * Who Won First Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate		
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Total
4-Way Postsidential Vote	Al Gore, Democrat	255	11	266
	George W. Bush, Republican	35	212	247
	Pat Buchanan, Reform Party	2	3	5
	Ralph Nader, Green Party	16	13	29
Total		308	239	547

Figure 18: 4-Way Postsidential Vote * Who Won Second Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #2 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Tie	Total
4-Way Postsidential Vote	Al Gore, Democrat	162	11	62	235
	George W. Bush, Republican	4	151	47	202
	Pat Buchanan, Reform Party	1	1	1	3
	Ralph Nader, Green Party	7	7	7	21
Total		174	170	117	461

Figure 19: 4-Way Postsidential Vote * Who Won Third Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Tie	Total
4-Way Postsidential Vote	Al Gore, Democrat	173	14	29	216
	George W. Bush, Republican	12	156	30	198
	Pat Buchanan, Reform Party	1	1	1	3
	Ralph Nader, Green Party	9	2	5	16
Total		195	173	65	433

Figure 20: Describe Gore Support * Who Won First Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate		
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Total
Describe Gore Support	Enthusiastically supporting him	111	1	112
	Supporting him, but have reservations about him	128	12	140
	Supporting him only because he is the Democratic candidate	26	1	27
Total		265	14	279

Figure 21: Describe Bush Support * Who Won First Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate		
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Total
Describe Bush Support	Enthusiastically supporting him	4	91	95
	Supporting him, but have reservations about him	29	112	141
	Supporting him only because he is the Republican candidate	4	18	22
Total		37	221	258

Figure 22: Describe Gore Support * Who Won Second Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #2 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Tie	Total
Describe Gore Support	Enthusiastically supporting him	69	2	15	86
	Supporting him but have reservations about him	84	9	45	138
	Supporting him only because his is the Dem/Rep party nominee	13	0	5	18
Total		166	11	65	242

Figure 23: Describe Bush Support * Who Won Second Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #2 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Tie	Total
Describe Bush Support	Enthusiastically supporting him	0	90	12	102
	Supporting him but have reservations about him	5	61	32	98
	Supporting him only because his is the Dem/Rep party nominee	1	5	2	8
Total		6	156	46	208

Figure 24: Gore Mind Made Up * Who Won Third Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Tie	Total
Gore Mind Made Up	Mind Made Up	152	7	22	181
	Too Early to Say for Sure	31	7	10	48
Total		183	14	32	229

Figure 25: Bush Mind Made Up * Who Won Third Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000

		Who Won Debate			
		Al Gore	George W. Bush	Tie	Total
Bush Mind Made Up	Mind Made Up	8	136	23	167
	Too Early to Say for Sure	4	22	9	35
Total		12	158	32	202

Figure 26: Debate Affect Vote * Likely to Watch First Debate Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Pre-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000

		Likely to Watch Debate			
		Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not likely	Total
Debate Affect Vote	Great deal of influence	89	31	6	126
	I will vote based mostly on other things	229	188	105	522
Total		318	219	111	648

Figure 27: Feel/Bush Being President * Debatewatch Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000

		Did respondent watch one of the three debates?		
		Watched a debate	Did not watch any debates	Total
Feel/Bush Being President	I feel better about the idea	189	5	194
	I feel worse about the idea	120	11	131
	I feel the same now as I did then	150	36	186
Total		459	52	511

Figure 28: Feel/Gore Being President * Debatewatch Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #3 Poll, October 2000

		Did respondent watch one of the three debates?		
		Watched a debate	Did not watch any debates	Total
Feel/Gore Being President	I feel better about the idea	164	8	172
	I feel worse about the idea	153	7	160
	I feel the same now as I did then	141	37	178
Total		458	52	510

Figure 29: Watched First Debate * Candidate Preference Change Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #1 Poll, October 2000

		Did respondents' voting intention change?		
		Same candidate	Changed candidate	Total
Watched Debate	Yes	509	43	552
	No	66	8	74
Total		575	51	626

Figure 30: Watched Second Debate * Candidate Preference Change Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #2 Poll, October 2000

		Did respondents' voting intention change?		
		Same candidate	Changed candidate	Total
Watched Debate	Yes	429	33	462
	No	73	9	82
Total		502	42	544

Figure 31: Watched Third Debate * Candidate Preference Change Cross-tabulation
Source: CBS News Post-Debate #4 Poll, October 2000

		Did respondents' voting intention change?		
		Same candidate	Changed candidate	Total
Watched Debate	Yes	412	21	433
	No	66	1	67
Total		478	22	500